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Four Quarters



Frank Reynolds, N.A.



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Four Quarters

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Ash Wednesday

DANIEL BURKE, F.S.C.

Brothers, celebrate with me this morning
our mortality
with hunger and the day's
dusty ritual.
And then let us praise old men
who know the ultimate of earth
but now are dazzled
with autumn leaves, snow at noon,
the slow life of plants in humid rooms;
who hobble through the villages of childhood
with no cry of wonder or lament;
who touch the last pool of memory,
water so clear and still
it is invisible,
and see the mythic coming of the night.

Old men, we praise you
who show us in a dying world
how to live the day that is
and savor it,
who rejoice
while dust turns back to dust.

Shy Bearers

LESTER GOLDBERG

THE CHURCH BELLS are in full cry as Krueger bicycles up the main road rising out of Moreton-Hampstead. He winces when a holiday car comes too close and swerves around him. The road steepens gradually, and after a few last leg strokes, toes trapped in the clips, he dismounts and walks, pushing the new black bike up the hill. Now he can search the fields for the red and yellow poppies he remembers; the day sharpens and stands poised. His old World War II billet wasn't far away—a glance at the map and he could find his way in a long day's ride, and he will do it, he decides—if only to make the bells stop ringing in his ears.

Those other chimes had given him no rest the first few nights at Evelyn Kiley's. Outside his little upstairs room that overlooked the rear garden, the church bells played a tune every fifteen minutes. On the half hour picked up the first tune and added a few bars; at three quarters, the bells replayed the first and second bars and added a third part, and on the hour—the reprise of Come All Ye Faithful. He had asked Evelyn for another room or could she stop the bells. No chance, Evelyn said, they'd been off all during the blackout and blitz and now after V-E day on they went, and they might ring on for the next five hundred years. Krueger realized he had arrived too late. The danger past. Wrong-way Krueger: all the others are on their way home and Sgt. Krueger had been left behind to sit in the office all day and stamp discharge papers. Flight mechanics, bombardiers, pilots; majors no older than Krueger passed through his hands and back to the States.

Krueger had washed out of flight training in Big Springs, Texas, after one month. He dropped out of college to fly into it. Whirled and spun around in the training cockpit, and afterwards, the officer said, you'll never make it son, you're a fine specimen but your equilibrium is off. A Staten Island girl had comforted him, (I may never come back, he warned her, half-believing it), comforted him several times in a copse near Miller Field. Only it was actually a woodlot; Krueger transformed it into a copse and one could imagine it so, on a warm June day, sniffing the wild honeysuckle. Krueger didn't ship out. He stayed. He overstayed.

Then she continued to write long letters to him in England, and she made plans. Krueger, in the full knowledge that once, this

once, he was unmaking plans that had been ordained for him, shucked her when he returned across 3,000 miles; crossing the Hudson, this time, he married a New Jersey girl. His wife is waiting now in London. She doesn't write, can't write. He's left no itinerary. Krueger, when he thought about it, which wasn't often, imagined her visiting the Tower of London. It had escaped damage during the war, but last week the I.R.A. provisional wing set off a bomb in the Tower. In the Tower, Krueger envisioned a small bare room with rough rock walls. His wife, after viewing the Crown Jewels (step lively now, keep moving), looked through a slit in the wall and saw him strapped to a stone bench. One waited while the ceiling descended and the walls moved closer. If one closed one's eyes, it didn't help. Then double-chinned Robert Morley came in, crooning, we'll take good care of you. You don't look comfortable, my boy. Would you be happier not staring up at the ceiling? I could see to it that you're strapped facing down, so you could look at the floor. Krueger waved him away.

A LONG UPHILL SLOG to reach the first Dartmoor plateau and as Krueger climbs higher, leaning on the handlebars, the purple moor grass and scrawny hawthorns disappear, until at the top only cairns of granite and yellow-flowered gorse and bracken survive; four grazing ponies disappear into the fog settling over the moors; the passing cars turn headlights on and as Krueger remounts, a cold drizzle begins. It turns into a steady, pelting rain, and a pool of water fills the fold in Krueger's cape, draped over the handlebars.

Krueger flips the puddle out of his lap. Can see about five feet ahead in the swirling fog. Several cars stop and pull over. Others move slowly, no faster than he pedals. A gray wraith cuts across his path and turns into a sheep which leaps the rock fence and runs off bleating into the fog. He wonders if Evelyn is still alive. Christmas cards for twenty-seven years but none last year. A tall woman, no extra flesh on her, wide forehead, pale blue eyes, matronly bosom, a pink sweater pushed up from the wrists exposing roughened elbows, and muscular calves you sometimes see on an older waitress. A deer tapestry in rust and brown hung over the fireplace. She spoke more quickly than the local people.

"I had two little girls from London staying here during the Blitz and neither wore knickers under their frocks, poor dears. Now I have you young sojers. And Marla, I took her in when she was three months old. My cousin's child. I wasn't married then, still at home, taking care of my old dad. She doesn't look eighteen, does she? You don't talk much, Sergeant." Krueger remembers the troll-girl's thick neck, how her head always tilted to one side and her heavy shoulders set on a blocky body.

One morning, Krueger, walking past the dining room, saw

Marla clearing the tables and Evelyn Kiley on the floor, wearing a green exercise suit that ended in a pair of flapping, pleated bloomers, halfway down her lean thighs. He paused and heard the radio: Hello dears. This is Penelope Snedeker and her morning exercise class. Evelyn stretched and thrust right hand to left toe and left hand to right toe but not quite in time to the radio's commands.

"Hello, Krueger," she panted, reaching deliberately and ignoring the radio's—On your feet. She stretched right, "Krueger, my husband, Victor, six years in the German camps," stretched left, "should be home soon. You're the oldest man here, Krueger (already old at twenty-three, Krueger thought), and you're a sergeant and carry a book under your arm." She reached negligently and more slowly, "So it's you I'm looking to for advice. Marla's a dear girl, and plays the accordion, and helps with the cleaning and can tell colors. That's all, Krueger! She can't make change, can't shop, can't cook. I had to take her out of school after three years. They said she'd never learn to read. The girl's never peeled a banana, I can hardly remember the last one I've tasted. She's never tasted pepper. There's no elastic so it's hard to fix a pair of drawers. She's never owned a pair of nylons. She's got a boyfriend, Sergeant. A twenty-year-old farm laborer. He has no home and he's no smarter than she is. He wants to marry her. Can I deny her love, Krueger, can I? What do you think?"

"It's not my affair," and he turned his back and walked out.

Krueger yawned his day away stamping discharges: aircraft mechanics, clerks, heroes, majors (back to the hospital for the major with four oak leaf clusters and excess albumin), captains, mad bombers, gunners, a colonel. He picked up another blue V-Mail from Staten Island and stuffed it into his shirt pocket. Bought a carton of cigarettes at the PX and, impulsively, he grabbed four pairs of nylons, a neutral shade, and a set of pick-up-sticks.

Krueger lingered over tea that evening. After the other three soldiers left, he called out, "Another cuppa, please Marla." She poured, her stubby fingers curled over the bunny ears of the pink and green wool tea cozy. "Sit down, Marla, have a cup with me." She sat heavily, gazing straight ahead, her hand still clutching the teapot handle. He laid some change on the table: sixpence, a few shillings, two florins, a half crown, "Let's play a game. Can you guess how many shillings I have?" and he covered the shillings with his cupped hand.

She shook her head, dipping it toward her right shoulder and upright again.

"Just guess?"

"I can't. Your hand is on them."

He withdrew his hand. Krueger saw Evelyn watching from the kitchen doorway.

"Four?"

"That's right. Just grand. Now suppose you went into a store to buy a pair of nylons."

"There aren't any."

"Just pretend. The man asks you for six shillings and . . ."

"But there aren't any nylons!"

"Stay put, right here." Krueger jumped up and took the staircase to his room, two steps at a time. He came down with his gifts and gave Marla and Evelyn two pairs of nylons each, and to Marla the box of pick-up-sticks.

Evelyn pecked him high on one cheek. Marla, clutching the box, ran up to her room. Evelyn poured more tea and brought out a piece of fruitcake she had been saving; "Not enough for the crowd," she said. It tasted good after the salty mackerel dinner. Marla returned, without her apron, and wearing a new yellow blouse. She held the box in her hand.

"Sit near me," Krueger said, "and I'll show you how to play." He showered the colored slivers on the table, picked up four or five and soon missed. He held Marla's hand around the bundle and let them fall again. With her stubby fingers, she picked up more sticks than Krueger on the first attempt. Krueger found later, he didn't have to let her win. She usually beat him easily and wanted to play every evening after tea. If he said, "Wait until I finish my tea," she circled the table with the sticks in her fist, peering over his shoulder into the tea cup. One day, he borrowed Evelyn's husband's wheel and, with Marla on her bike, rode to the grocery. Turning daredevil, he rode without hands, and then placed his feet on the handlebars. Marla applauded wildly. Soon he was skipping the pub more often and sat around in front of the peat fire, reading *Sons and Lovers* that, until now, he'd only carried under his arm.

THE WIND LASHES Krueger as the fog begins to lift.

"We're celebrating, Evelyn, you and Marla and I, three tickets on the bus tour to Land's End. Hard to get, too. Now you've no excuse not to wear those stockings. Pull those nylons up around those good looking legs and let's go."

"You're sure you want an old lady along," Evelyn sniffed, "what with all the time you've been spending with poor Marla."

In front of Krueger, sat Evelyn; never a beauty, today she had achieved majesty. Too short notice to get her brown hair frizzed by a new perm, her hair looked better this way; she must have found a new bra, creating a promontory under her white satin blouse tucked into a grassy-green skirt, plus the nylons and tan pumps. Marla sat next to her, in the yellow blouse, blonde hair brushed and gleaming, and combed down to one side to cover the thicker part of her neck. She clasped the accordion case tightly in her lap.

The bus sped past fields of barley, the wind pressing the

golden, bearded stalks almost to the earth, the wind soughing past Krueger's window, a rock fence and a field of blue alfalfa, a small woods. Nothing stayed very long in his view. He counted six pollarded oaks, like sturdy old men whose heads had been lopped off, and from whose necks sprouted three or four new arms. The bus driver tipped the blue cap back on his head. Swaying as he swept the wheel from side to side, and the bus climbed and rocked harmoniously, he sang songs about sons sailing o'er the seas, mothers mourning and sweethearts pining. He urged the passengers, "Sing along now, don't let the old Singing Bus Driver down." Stony silence. The passengers stared out the windows.

The bus rolled through the moorlands, honking sheep off the road, past a wire-fenced area, restricted zone sign up and, within, two soldiers carrying long metal wands and searching the fields.

"There's a beautiful little girl back there with an accordion on her lap. How about a song from the little duckling?"

Marla blushed and hugged her accordion case. Krueger leaned forward, touching her shoulder, "Go ahead Marla, give them a song." She took the accordion from its case and bending over it, played a few chords. Then she launched into *Galway Bay*, and without resting played *Lord Randal* and when she played *Bawbee Allen*, a cracked voice in the rear picked up the refrain—"O, mither dear, you'll mak' my bed / Ye'll mak' it saft and narrow." A clapping of hands that grew louder. Krueger touched her heavy shoulder; she shuddered, bowed her head. "Lovely music, Marla. You have the gift." He wanted to kiss the back of her head.

Going up the hill, the driver shifted gears, the motor coughed and choked and, just below the crest, the bus stopped. It slid back and the driver jammed the footbrake, pulled the emergency and opened the door. He tramped on the gas, ground the starter, but the motor wouldn't turn over. Again the screech of the starter and no ignition. "Ducks and ducklings—let's hear *God Save the King*." They finally sang. "Step up front, Sergeant. The American Army gets out first. Stand below those steps and help the English ladies down. Don't let them walk over the cliff. Stay away from the edge of the road, mates, over the hill and it's a short walk to the inn below."

Krueger hopped off and stationed himself below the steps, his back to the bluff that dropped one hundred feet and then the land leveled off. Slowly the passengers alighted and Krueger aided the women; Evelyn tendered her hand, wrist bent, like Queen Mary giving her hand to an Indian sepoy. The men, except for the very old, disdained his outstretched hand, and in a long straggling line, they walked up the hill.

Krueger reached toward Marla who had trouble closing her accordion case. As she stepped off, she threw herself on him, both hands encircling his neck, her accordion smacked against his ribs, and he staggered back, grabbed her wrists; she was choking him,

hanging from him, feet off the ground. Her thrust made him stumble, his back felt naked; he heard Evelyn scream and a cry—watch out, mate! He steadied, planted his feet firmly and embraced her, felt her pulsing in his arms, like a pigeon he'd once held against his chest, all of her bursting and beating against him in one mad flight.

A HEAD, NORTH HESSARY TOR rises to the west. Behind him lies a hill, perhaps the same hill. Bearing down on both handbrakes, Krueger starts the long downhill run. He might find at the bottom an inn on the left hand side, and a bridge crossing the river. He sweeps the yellow hood off his head and snaps a look left, the bike picks up speed, and down he flies, the hood flapping and pulling like a sail, holding his head taut with the pressure of the wind—the inn flashes by. He glimpses the inn sign—TWO RIVERS and underneath, the ever-present motto HAVE COURAGE. He wants to shout back at the hill, the fog—COURAGE, COURAGE for Richard, the Lion-Hearted, COURAGE. Mustn't jar the English, he thinks; and now when the bike hits the flat and crosses the bridge, he wants to place his feet on the handlebars or ride without hands. Instead, he applies the brakes, stops and pulls over to the side. Krueger, his legs shaky, turns the bike around and walks back toward the inn.

Krueger orders a double whiskey at the bar and takes it into the lounge. Standing in front of the stone fireplace, he turns his back and like Robert Donat in an old film, toasts his backside, swaying back and forth. He kneads his right thigh. Then he takes the map from his windbreaker's zipper pocket and spreads it on the table that smells of beer spillings. Drowsy, he knuckles his eyes, and studies the scribble of roads that run north-south between the inn and Horrabridge. The bartender sticks his head into the lounge crying, Last Call, and Krueger determined to get off the heavily traveled A384, traces a squiggle of yellow-marked roads to his destination.

Aided by a tail wind, he journeys south. Krueger almost turned back when the wind tore at him as he opened the pub door, but no, he'd stay with the impulse, ride with it and drop in at the Kileys'. He could have phoned from the inn, forewarned them, the polite thing to do; it had been twenty-eight years and Evelyn (if alive, she'd be sixty-seven), he remembered, had acted strangely the night they returned from the bus tour.

Krueger, reading in his tiny room under the high small window, so badly cut out of the thick walls that he had stuffed old torn underwear into the chinks around the ill-fitting casement, heard Evelyn running a bath in the round high tub. Restless, he stepped out of his room, thinking he might go down and brew some

tea. He heard splashing sounds from the bathroom, feminine and awkward and vigorous. A crack of light along the edge of the door.

"Victor always scrubbed my back, Krueger." He stood breathing deeply at the head of the staircase. "That's why I'm faithful to him after six years. Do you hear me, Krueger? Krueger! I've had my chances."

"I hear you Evelyn," and his voice resounded in the narrow hallway. No sound of splashing but from the far end of the hall the accordion played a few bars of *Bawbee Allen*, then it went berserk and repeated the same chord—a siren.

"Get dressed, Evelyn. I'll take you down to the pub."

"You never asked me before."

"I'm asking you now." The accordion shrieked.

"People will talk. Go yourself. In fact, go to hell, Krueger."

He left a month later and although he asked her twice more, she never went down to the pub.

It has rained forever for Krueger: pedal, dismount and walk, pedal again. The lane forks, uphill to the right, and he gets off and starts the half-mile trek up an even narrower hunchbacked lane. Twist and turn, always the impenetrable hedgerows alongside, shoulder-high banks of earth topped by beech saplings and hawthorn, interlaced with brambles; then the gray sky opens at a pasture entrance, the red earth churned by cattle crossing.

A milk truck, cans jouncing, comes down the lane and Krueger presses against the unyielding hedgerows; the brambles catch his jeans and make scratchy plastic noises against his rain cape.

The thick-walled cob house with its overhanging thatched roof sits broadside facing the road. Krueger looks up at the small, higher window at the left corner of the house. It had been cut through not long before he arrived when the room was partitioned to make extra bedrooms. No smoke rising from the side stone chimney.

He leans his bike under the roof overhang. Knocks softly, then louder, his old signal—three knocks, pause, two knocks.

EVELYN OPENS the door. "Come in, Krueger. You'll catch your death. Come on, don't stand in the rain, staring at me, just hang your cape on that hook." She backs up a few steps, still looking at him and when he crosses the threshold and hangs his cape, she says, "You're quite gray after all these years but still lean." She pats her hips with both hands.

Krueger tries to recognize her. He wants to. Brown frizzled hair mixed with gray, and her angularity, the sharp chin and bony shoulders now all filled in—a tall heavy woman, and it is only when she turns away, saying, "I'll put the kettle on," and walks across the dining room to the kitchen that her long, determined stride brings back the younger woman.

He sits at the table while she fills the kettle and sets out the tea things. "I feel at home here because your pictures still hang crookedly."

"You must still like cucumber sandwiches," she says, slicing the long green cucumber. She places two sandwiches cut in triangles in front of him. Two apple tarts, the juice running out of them, one onto each white bowl. A large bowl of thick Devon cream.

Krueger methodically eats the four sandwich halves while Evelyn watches. He spoons the cream onto one tart. He cuts off a yawn by taking a deep breath. "How's your sister?"

"You mean Charlotte? She didn't take care and quite lost her figger," Evelyn drew herself up.

"Your husband, Victor?"

"Victor? I gave him a very good life when he came back. He was busy caring for his peonies and got his old job back digging graves. He died peacefully, sitting right on the old couch in the lounge," and she waves toward the sitting room. "He was lacing up his boots."

What could he tell her about himself? She asks no questions. "How is Marla?"

"She had a lovely concert at the church before she died. The whole town came. That kind dies young."

"Ah—that lovely child—"

She pours more tea. "That kind dies young. Do you remember, Krueger, the night before the bus trip, your lovely treat, and Marla wanted to eat by candlelight like during the blitz."

He nodded, recalling how their faces shone, dancing suspended in the dark, all blemishes vanished.

"And I made that special trifle you loved, rainbow colored with heavy cream."

"How did you get cream in those days, Evelyn?"

"I have my ways."

Krueger closes his eyes and snaps them open. Closes them again.

"You cut a fine figure of a soldier, Krueger. That you did."

"And you're still a very handsome woman yourself, Evelyn."

"Why don't you make yourself comfortable on the couch in the lounge? Take off those wet shoes."

"I'll help you clear—"

"No, no. Go ahead and get your rest."

Krueger enters the lounge and sits on the couch facing the deer tapestry that hangs to the right of the fireplace. On the left side of the mantel, a light green elephant on a gray onyx stand; to the right, just below the fringed edge of the tapestry, stand three translucent glass mice, a red, a yellow and a blue one. He stands and looks at the pictures: Victor Kiley in his woolen army uniform,

Victor with his hand throttling the neck of a giant peony—third prize, Victor and Evelyn, just married—two defiant chins. Krueger gazes at Evelyn holding Marla, in a knit suit, looking like any normal, rosy-cheeked English baby. He straightens the picture. Then sits down again. He tosses the pink-faced kewpie doll to the other end of the couch and wonders if its smaller sister is still upstairs in the toilet, its crinkled skirt coyly covering the spare roll of toilet tissue. He can't keep his eyes open.

Evelyn walks in and switches on the electric heater that stands in the fireplace recess. A warm glow. As good as the old coal or peat fire.

He hears the sound of running water in the kitchen. A sharp noise, of a dish dropped. Broken? It thrusts him awake. Warmth creeps from the soles of his feet, up his toes, to his calves. Evelyn walks in and throws a blanket over him. He drowns, sitting upright. She goes out. He slides lower on the couch. She returns and with his eyes half-closed, he can sense her watching over him.

She lifts the blanket stealthily and eases herself down onto the center of the couch, drawing the blanket over both of them. Wide-awake now, he watches through veiled lids. She shifts closer. Three inches separate them. He smells the scent of violets. He tucks his legs under him. His wallet, clasped to the folder of the traveler's cheques by a rubber band, digs into his pelvis.

Sitting upright, he stretches both hands in the air, dropping the blanket from around his neck and letting it fall on his lap. "I must be moving on. I'm all dried out now."

She sits up, back straight. "I thought you'd stay the night. It's still raining ducks and drakes."

"No, I can't. Awfully sorry. Must get back to London."

"Whatever is your first name, Krueger? I have it written down some place but for all the world, I can't remember."

"I'm called Henry." Although he'd signed his cards Sergeant Krueger for many years and in the old days everyone called him Krueger, he was certain she hadn't forgotten. He stands, picks up his shoes and slips a hand inside one—still wet. He sits on a chair and draws them on. Hard to tie wet laces. He stamps his feet several times and rises. Leaning over Evelyn, he tucks the blanket around her shoulders, and kisses her on one cheek. With a twist of her body, she shrugs the blanket off. She doesn't stir. Nor move, when he walks through the archway into the little hall and puts on his rain cape. He closes the door softly.

HE STEPS OFF into the rain and wheels his bike into place, back to the house. One foot on the left pedal, starts down the path, throws his right leg over, in the saddle, a glance back at the closed door.

The lane tumbles down and away with the aimlessness of a

horse's stream. Winding around the third bend, Krueger eases up on the handbrakes, then on a sharp pitch, he squeezes the brake; the bike will not slow down, the wet brakes don't grab and in seconds he is hurtling down the hill. An S curve ahead, he's hidden by the cloistral hedgerows, and if a car comes up the lane—he takes his feet off the pedals—perhaps stop by braking with his shoetips, impossible now at this speed and deliberately, before it's too late—he turns the handlebars, left and slams into the bank. Dazed, he's lying in the road; can't see his bike. The cold rain strikes the back of his neck. He gets to his knees, hands propping him, tries to get up, falls back and strikes one knee on the ground. Stays put, on his knees.

He'd come through, pierced the other side, and Krueger, Krueger, he tells himself, you're an old hand, you missed a connection, Krueger—why didn't your head tell you to walk down that hill? Finally, he gets up and straightens his rain cape, looks at his torn left sleeve, slashed from elbow to wrist and flapping open. The back of his hand is gashed, earth-blackened and bleeding and his fingers feel sticky. He flexes wrists and elbows. He sees the bicycle lying behind him and reaching down into the rear pack pulls out his shaving kit and a towel. A knife pain strikes his ribs. He shakes out the shaving kit, toothbrush, razor, soap falls to the ground, and taking the wet soapy washcloth, he ties it around his wrist. He sucks in a deep good gulp of rare air. Again the knife pain. Ties a handkerchief to hold the cloth in place. He bends to pick up the bike. Dizzy, he almost pitches forward. The hell with the bike! Now, breathe delicately, breathe with care. He straightens and sees the handkerchief, dyed dark crimson. He'll not go back to the house, not ever again.

Krueger starts to walk down the lane, taking slow halting steps, breathing shallowly, and carefully measuring every breath of bestowed air.

My Flying Machine

LOUIS DANIEL BRODSKY

Once again I'm integrated with machinery,
Insulated; my nerves are cables
Stretching from pulley to pulley to aileron
And elevator. My mind is a panel
Crowded with instruments and toggle switches,
A cockpit of fidgeting needles and dials.
My tremulous eyes become gyros
Functioning in vacuums like silent worlds
Turning in space; my ears are tuned
To Pitot-static tubes
That check the speed of dreams along this odyssey.

The same flesh that protects my bones
Stretches over wings and fuselage
Fluting through zones of winds aloft.
This unearthly machine burns my blood,
Exhausts unoxygenated thoughts
And exploded harmonies, accelerates rhyme
Toward selected climaxes in time.
Only my voice, of the elements absorbed,
Remains unchanged and controlled by me:
It flies inside the slipstream
Each song I write leaves in its wake.

Reservations

WILLIAM MICKELBERRY

He was proud of being a tourist,
Proud of all the Cuba Libre's at the Cadillac Bar,
And that he'd paid to be aboard the boat,
The Millionaire's Tour, via the Gray Line.
But now he is crying, sailing through the purple light
At the end of his last paid sunny day.

He could have predicted this on the first day,
Of course, always having been a tourist
and wary of local customs, keeping it light,
managing to avoid disaster at the bar,
Always knowing when to draw the line,
and ending up alone, weeping on the tour boat,

And thinking of another sadness, another boat,
afloat at the beginning of a day,
the sun not up, but changing the black line
of shore to blue, the tourist
cottages pink. Minutes later a bar
of light fell across the water, this light

From the other direction, the direct light
Of the sun, warming him in his boat
And catching brightly on the small waves over the bar.
Suicidal during that night, not wanting another day
Thinking that it was time to stop being a tourist
in his life, he decided to see how far until the line

Of the horizon became a complete line,
A circle. But in the fresh reductive light
He saw that he would always be a tourist,
Out of gas, adrift in a rental boat
Far from the knowledge of water. That day
He knew he would live on, ankle deep on a sand bar.

Thirty years later, at the Cadillac Bar,
He noticed in the blue mirror, a line
cleft between his eyebrows, that day after day
Deepened with others, though the night light
still burned by his bed. Swaying, then, as if already on a boat
He navigated the lobby to the tourist

Information desk, the light blinding after the bar,
Bought a ticket on the Gray Line, boarded the boat,
A blooded tourist, another watery last day.

Crockery

JULIA BUDENZ

Long lilies in a blue jug
Lean like swans
From a blue pond, like the long
Sweep of the sounding of violins
From a lake of tone, like souls
All straining from an azure globe,
Each from a blue-veined pot.

Hilda Halfheart's Notes to the Milkman: #45

RUTH MOON KEMPHER

(One of the minor joys
you must
put up with in a megalopolis is
that your phone rings an
inordinate sum
of wrong numbers) bad enough
to be reading Henry James, & wonder
how to fix in mind a name like "Catherine Sloper"
which has no par-
ticular slant that strikes, plus
confusing some notes I couldn't find
(to myself) about parallels & paradigms
(Hart Crane, *The Bridge*: "to swim the hiving swarms
out of the Square . . ." up 20 lines
ref. is not to Wash. Sq. but *Times*. & who
always said *Washington Square* meant Calvin Coolidge?)
anyway, I said "hello" sort of peevish, maybe
& this puzzled lady
said: "May I speak to Kiki, please?"
"I don't know anybody by that name—" But 30 years slid back
to Philadelphia, Aunt Kate's place— "A Kimi, though—"
Squirrels skittering & Aunt Kate, with tremulous wet lips
"This isn't— the residence of Kiki Popadopolous?"
"Ah, no." The Square there, Rittenhouse
with yellow, fan-leaved ginkgo trees, here now, close
as memory & a sloe-eyed oval
ivory face, 2 long black braids, adept at jacks—
Kimiko Priscilla Kikashima, from 6th grade.
But o, again— imagine the house James could construct
for a Kiki Popadopolous

The Rememberers

EUGENE K. GARBER

THE TWO OF THEM agreed that, by remembering, they might unearth the message buried under the tell-tale tumulus that covered the dolmens that formed the crypt, the nether house that forgetfulness built. So he began.

Remember in San Francisco far down the shank of her widowhood she curst stairs, hills, and all declivities. And I said, "Foolish maledictions, Mother. It's not the hills that pitch us tipplers down."

"What is it, then, and I'll curse that."

"Newton called it gravity. Actually, as we poets know, it is a yearning in the bowels of Mother Earth to have us back."

"To hell with Mother Earth."

"Precisely."

And you said, "Who're *we poets?*"

"My Mother and I."

"On what grounds?" I thank you for that line, sister.

"Why here. On the rolling hills of San Francisco. My mother is a left-legged trochee and I am a right-legged iamb, and between us we eat up miles of city." And you, sister, you were our sturdy spondee, for by then you had overcome the terrible dactylic mother-fear of your childhood. "Take my arm, Mama," you said.

"Not *eat* up the city, son," she said. "Drink it up." And, remember, she took us into that hillside bar, the street like a baldric athwart the window. The bartender had a big white talking bird, God knows what kind, with a fierce backswept crest like a cockatoo's. And the bird paced the bar and said, "I want a drink. A shot. A double. A pick-up. Hair of dog." And when the others laughed, she did not. "Give it a drink on me, Ed." The bartender set down a little saucer of beer. The bird dipped its beak and the bartender rang up ninety cents. "Smartest gigolo in San Francisco," he said, and the bar was aroar. Then the bartender tapped the bird on its crown and it said, "Madame, you are a slut." And while the others laughed, I said, "The raven himself is hoarse . . ." and you said, "Ready to go, bards?" But our mother picked the bird up, remember, and stuck its head in her mouth.

"For God's sake, Mary!" shouted the bartender.

"Hark," I said, "and you shall hear a description of the heart of darkness, for it is in the nature of birds to prophesy."

"For God's sake, Mary, put it down!"

But she bared her teeth and winked horribly, Polyphemus and a woefully wriggling Greek. "Miss," the bartender said, "ask her to put it down. The bird is priceless."

"Can it make courtly speeches of eloquent regret?" I said.

"Put it down, Mama," you said.

Out on the street again, leaning against the malevolent hills, she said, "Believe it or not, that man was once kind to me, or I would have bitten it off."

THEN IT WAS her turn.

I remember the childhood things. The old people and the deaths. The black holes. I remember great Uncle Louis's funeral in Birmingham. You said the grave was lined fetchingly with plastic grass, but it was a black hole to me, with our mother weaving and tilting over it, drunk. I was thirteen and you were seventeen, but you were already clever with words. Do you remember what you said? "Do you contemplate leaping into the grave and cursing the churlish priest, mother?"

"I can curse 'em all from where I stand."

"Stand?" you said. "You give yourself too little credit. Not the flying Romanos or Tamburi the tightrope-walker or Moscato the human fly have ever thrilled an audience with such death-defying teetering." But I was not laughing inside. I was wishing that she would pitch down on top the coffin and they wouldn't see it and would bury her with him.

You tried to cheer me up. In Aunt Laura's velvet-draped living room, where there never had been a child, you whispered to me, "Fee fie fo fum. I smell gold." But I only smelled the dead man's cigars and the whiskey on Mama's breath. She was giving one of those monologues that always came just a little before she passed out. "You had a good husband, Aunt Laura. I especially admired the way he kept the world under his foot and lectured it and whipped it with his cane. I liked his old imperial, too, which was gold and pointy. And the game of blueberries. Not blue-beard, but blueberries. Did you ever play blueberries with Uncle Louis, Aunt Laura?"

"I don't know what it was, Mary."

"You sat in his lap and pulled his beard and then came a pinch so sudden that before you could holler out he was already whispering in your ear. 'When you take off your panties tonight, little girl, you look down there at the little blueberry. It is just a tidbit of what the Man is going to give you when you grow up.' And there it was, Aunt Laura, sure enough, a pretty little blue

tweak that you would like to show off, but it was in the wrong place. And if you pulled Uncle Louis's beard again, you would get another tweak and Uncle Louis would whisper, "The Man is getting closer, ain't he, honey?" I gave three pulls, then I lost courage. How many did you give, Maggie?" I didn't answer. "This one is a shy one," she said. Aunt Laura began to get pop-eyed and to swallow, the way she did when she got nervous. I looked at you, but you only whispered, "Our gold has gone aglimmering, sis." I felt like I was in a black hole.

"So in our family, Aunt Laura, thanks to Uncle Louis, we don't have blue-bloods, we have blue-bottoms, all us ladies. Ain't it true, Maggie? But it was a grand lesson, a vaccination you might call it. I believe he gave it to some of his office girls, too, just to help them over the silly fear of The Man we southern girls sometimes have. When in truth The Man is about the last thing worth worrying about. Ain't that true, Maggie?" She swallowed some bourbon. "So you had a good husband, Laura. But I had one that was already dead when I married him. He took me to live in New Orleans, with these two children. Have you ever been to New Orleans, Laura?" Aunt Laura shook her head and swallowed. "It is the muggiest goddam city in the world. There were days I couldn't lift my arms because they were plastered to my ribs with sweat. And the streets were full of frenchies, wops, creoles, and cajuns, what the hell ever you call 'em. Not a genuine white in every hundred. Did I mention the Irish and the niggers? And whoever heard of Catholic niggers? They don't allow Catholics to be niggers here in Birmingham, do they, Laura? And flat? Good God. I told him, 'goddam you, Coleman, for bringing me to this nigger bottom land. You know I was a north Alabama hill girl. I need for it to roll a little. They ought to open up the levee and give this nigger bottom land back to Old Man River. It's driving me to drink.' " She threw her head back and made that hiccupping drunk laugh of hers.

You said, "Now that we live in hilly San Francisco, what's driving you to drink?" She didn't answer. She was almost gone. She was watching Aunt Laura swallow. "You ought to spit that stuff out, Laura, before it chokes you." She stood up and looked around, weaving and tilting. "Where's Uncle Louis's brass spittoon all swimming with cigar butts and phlegm? You know what that son of a bitch once told me? He said, 'Mary, you know why I make so many hawkums?' He pointed to the spittoon with his cane. 'Why do you make so many hawkums, Uncle Louis?' 'Because when I get enough of 'em in there they make a clouded-up gypsy's ball where I can see the future.' 'What do you see, Uncle Louis?' 'I see you riding The Man from one end of this grand old republic to the other.' He grabbed me and plumped me down on his knee. *Bookity, bookity, bookity. book!*" She laughed and hic-

coughed and weaved over to Aunt Laura. She teetered above her and then stooped over and hollered, "My God, Laura, what are you doing down there in that black hole. I can hardly see you. Tomorrow we'll hire some niggers to dig you out. We'll tear down all these goddam drapes and let the sun shine in." And then she sat down in Laura's lap and began to twiddle her beardless chin. And I wished then that I hadn't been afraid to push her, while she was teetering, into Uncle Louis's grave.

For shame, sister. You have a memory like a buzzard. Don't you recollect anything but death?

HE SPOKE.

I remember Mama's mama, Laura's sister. I don't call her granny because that was just a word Mama made us use. She was crazy, wasn't she? She sat in a rocker with that dog at her feet, remember, that looked like a circus animal because it always had mange and was spotted with gentian violet. She recited names. "My sister Laura lives in Birmingham married to a rich man named Louis. Another has gone to Rome, Georgia. Her name is Rose and she has married a teacher named John. My sister Adelaide is in Montgomery. Calvin is her husband's name. Only I have stayed here in Ely with my husband the Reverend Doan and Boy." Then she would look down to make sure that Boy was at her feet. And, remember, Mama told us there had been three Boys since the first one died.

"I have given birth to three: Elbert who died in infancy, Tom that the Japs killed five years ago in 1942, and you, Mary." Mama said, "You don't have to remember all those names and times and places, Mama. Just sit and look down at the Tennessee River. In Florence you would have to pay a million dollars for this view and the river would be all dammed up to boot." "That's what your father used to say before he died, Mary. That I didn't have to remember it because it is all written down in a book of rose petals. But suppose it isn't and I forget it. Where will it all go then, Mary?"

Rose petals? That's not what I was thinking. I was thinking that under the ground were piled so many dead bodies of people and animals that if you poked a stick as much as six inches down the stink would puff up at you. It would smell like Mama's breath when she was drinking, which was the only good thing about going to Ely in the summer—at least for a while Mama didn't drink.

Do you remember the day two young black dog-catchers came who worked for the county on a bounty basis? They threw a net over Boy and were dragging him to the truck when Mama ran out of the house. She had a knife in her hand because she had been chopping okra. You were throwing rocks at the truck. Mama ran

up to them and said, "Let that dog loose that you dragged out of my yard." One of them said, "We can't. Once we catch 'em you have to come down to the pound. It's the law." "You want to open the net," she said, "or you want me to cut it open?" She showed them the knife. One of them must have made a little motion at her because she said, "That's another thing. One of you boys might grab the knife in time, or I might place it right where your life is. My daddy taught me to castrate boars out back, which makes 'em mad, so you have to work real fast, but you know that already. Which will it be?" They let him go. One of them said, "Let it loose, Tate. It ain't but one dollar and it looks like it might die before we got it back." So Mama carried Boy in and laid him down on his rug. "What was all that ruckus, Mary?" "The dog-catchers tried to take Boy, Mama. You have to keep him out back inside the fence now. You can't let him out front any more." "Boy has gone out front whenever he wanted to since before you were born. He gets the scent of the river better and visits with the others." And you said, "I hope the first three Boys got recorded in the big rose book or else it doesn't appear that they will make it into eternity." And Mama took you back to the kitchen and sat you down and waved the knife under your nose. "Now listen to me carefully, Tom. The first Boy was a kind of half-breed Great Dane that I used to ride like a horse. The second one was a sweet collie dog with a white face like an angel. The third one was a fox terrier that laid by the pulpit when my daddy preached and looked out into the congregation and told him later who didn't pay attention. The fourth you know. Now you're going to remember those, aren't you, Tom?" She waved the knife under your nose. "You're going to remember them for my Mama. You're going to remember them after I die and for the rest of your life, aren't you Tom?" "Yes'm," you said. And it was so, wasn't it, Tom? But I shouldn't have been listening outside the door because the curse has fallen on me too. I have to remember all the Boys.

THEN HE SPOKE.

I remember the strange creature Retired Warrant Officer Bowman whom our mother led about the hills of this city in the penultimate year of her transitory life on earth. Think again, sister, of Boater, as we were bidden to call him, and take my hand as we walk again those malevolent hills which, miraculously, did not pitch our mother and me to our deaths, but a drunk is harder to kill than a turtle, having Mithridates-like vaccinated himself against death. To resume. You remember that Boater had suffered a stroke, that having a brain apparently very neatly cloven, he lost the use of precisely one side, the side sinister. The left eye

drooped, the left side of the mouth would not smile, and the left arm hung limply, and the left leg dragged heavily on those hills. Nevertheless he rowed gamely with his cane in our mother's wake. If you will pardon a minor indelicacy, sister, I speculate that this man's very cullions hung athwart the old dichotomy of life and death, and the left as gray and withered as those of the boars our mother once imagined she had held in hand, the right as round and ruddy as a peach. On the other hand, knowing our mother, we can surmise that love's instrument miraculously retained its proud potency. Nevertheless, you remember her constant plaint. "Boater, you goddam perverse old jarhead, why did you let the left side fall down? It's always the left sides I like best. That's because I grew up in Ely on the west slope of Mount Morris and my left leg is longer than my right leg. And that's also why I can walk the hills of this goddam humpback city blind drunk." And Boater would grate out his gallantry through his tilted smile, "Don't listen to that, Maggie and Tom, because your mother has a magic that makes me whole again. But I am sworn not to show it on the streets."

Of the many bars and restaurants in which the rich argosy of Boater's retirement pay fattened us, I choose the *Alhambra*, that elegant oasis of Moorish design, the door a giant keyhole, the walls a labyrinth of mosaics, the seats hassocks and camel saddles, and the ceiling a sky aglow with six-pointed stars. There betimes, remember, Boater recited for us the comedies and epics of the United States Marines. Of these again I choose only one, the saga of the great white barracks dog, Dog, who could smell a sniper a mile away but could not be house broken by the most violent beatings. In desperation the warriors flung him from the window after each defecation. This Dog at last understood and after every transgression leapt howling through the window.

Remember, too, it was in the *Alhambra* that we three met after Boater's third and fatal stroke and where our mother delivered her universal curse. "I can tell you that I have always understood that a woman will lose everything one by one—her virginity, her mama and daddy, her husbands and lovers—and I accepted that all you could do about it was sing Jesus a nigger spiritual. But I don't accept it any more, goddammit. Maker and earth, goddam 'em, if I had a big enough knife I would split it open like a watermelon and eat it and skeet the seeds in his face like a snaggle-tooth pickaninny." But you said, "What about Tom and me, Mama? You still have us."

"No, I don't. Children are born hollering to get free and never stop until you let 'em go. And the only difference with you two is that you were sired by a father that was worse pekid than I realized at first. So you hang around like a couple of mama-babies. Do I ask it? No, goddammit, I don't. Go get laid, Maggie, for God's

sake, before it's too late. And find yourself a woman, Tom. Don't hang on my tits any longer."

But I remember Dog best. Sometimes his blank white intransigence has soared into my dreams like a huge cloud. And then I see that he was all the Boys locked in all the mad heads—old women's, stricken Marines'—of all times. And we are him, too, Maggie, because we cannot stop doing the same thing over and over. From our vast storehouse of memories we can learn nothing.

AND SHE.
I deny it. Listen. I remember the unbearable. I remember the day in August of 1948 when we came back from Ely, the three of us. The minute Mama opened the door we knew it was not just the smell of liquor and cigarettes that Daddy had left behind before going out. But she said, "Only in New Orleans can a house smell like this," and went down the hall ahead of us. And after she had looked into the bedroom she pushed us back into the living room. And I cried and hollered, "I want to see him! I want to see him!" "Shut up, Maggie," she said, "before I let you." You got green and had to go outside. Later, when she had called the undertaker, she said, "There will be one good thing in this, children, I won't let 'em open the coffin, and all the high-born cousins and aunts and uncles who have not written as much as a Christmas card since the day we married and who will come to hover around the corpse like buzzards in Millman's funeral chapel will see nothing. In fact, maybe I won't even allow an Episcopal burial. Maybe I'll hire Daddy Divine, because in August niggers can sing and eulogize sweeter than angels."

When we got back from the funeral in Birmingham, the landlord had fumigated the house for us. She sniffed it carefully. "Ain't it nice, children. It smells like the lady's room in a swell hotel." Then, remember, she bought an air-conditioner and sat in front of it and drank and smoked and ordered barbecues and chicken and potato salad to the door. She said, "As soon as the insurance money comes, we will sell the furniture and the air-conditioner for whatever they bring and get out of this goddam shit-hole." And I said, "Where are we going to live, Mama? In Ely?" She laughed her hiccupping drunk laugh. "Maggie, have you lived with me twelve years and don't know me any better than to think I would live in Ely? The widow Morgan, the daughter of the late Preacher Doan of hell-fire-and-brimstone fame. Phew! Wild horses couldn't drag me there to live although I love my Mama, what's left of her." And you said, "Maybe you could marry a rich gentleman farmer." "There's no such thing as a gentleman farmer in Ely. There's only a mess of cob-ass Baptists that smell of corn-huskers lotion and burnt starch on Sunday and

mule shit the rest of the week." And you laughed. "Then where will we live?" She said, "Maybe I'll take the insurance money and become a fancy woman. It's an exciting life for the children too—eating in restaurants and living in big apartment buildings with the traffic passing below like a string of moving pearls on the neck of the city."

"What city?" you said.

"San Francisco, children, in the Golden West."

Later, as the liquor built up, she talked about Daddy. "Wasn't it just like him to die while I was gone. I could have held him in my arms a last time. But wasn't it just like that son of a bitch to swell up and stiffen while I was gone. Yes. Because he never was there when I needed him and only dragged me off to this nigger bottom city on false pretenses. We will have a creole romance in old New Orleans, he said. I will be the master and you will be my octaroon. Jesus Christ!" She laughed and hiccupped. "I should've had the son of a bitch cremated. He didn't deserve to be stuck in a black hole." And I said, "That kind of talk makes me sick," because I knew she was too drunk to catch me. But she didn't even try. "Goddam you, Maggie, sick or not you better listen to what I say, because I can look at you and tell that you are going to have a hard time finding out for yourself." That made my face red and my eyes smart, but I did say one more thing before my lips quivered too bad to talk. I said, "The only dirty things you could teach me are things I don't want to know."

WELL, WE HAVE SEARCHED the years, Maggie, as you said we must. We have combed the hills of Ely, Birmingham, and San Francisco and the flats of New Orleans. But I have not discovered anything much. I am only sad and a little sick. A good sign, you say? Go on? I will go on. I will remember our infamous leave-taking from our mother dear. The event can be precisely located: November the eleventh, 1953, my twenty-first birthday, five years and three months after our father's death. She was then living with the second of the three companions of her widowhood. Ed, the bartender, and Boater we have already encountered. To pause, however, and give credit where credit is due, let me say here that old Boater was as fine a half man as ever hobbled the hills of San Francisco, defying the man-eating riddle of our old mother Sphinx, walking as it were on two legs in the evening, the gold knob of his cane inscribed with the screaming eagle of the United States Marines.

But we were remembering our departure, sister. I was twenty-one and you were sweet seventeen, and it was in the time of Harrison and Dasher. Dasher was all right, with his intelligent and even noble face, with his ears as sharp as truncheons, with his brindled coat and with his prelatcal way of anointing the corner-

stones of buildings. Not even the pretentious silver-studded collar could diminish his dignity. I think perhaps I took courage from the dog to confront his master's mistress. You remember we had swiftly packed and carted our chattels to our secret apartment near the wharf. And they had come back for martinis after a coastal drive in Harrison's M.G. Harrison himself sat in his corner of the velvet couch under his neatly combed strawberry hair, occasionally admiring with his fingertips the silken texture of his ascot. The noble dog Dasher was in his quarters on the sun roof.

"Come have a drink," said mother brightly.

And Harrison said, "We want to toast Tom's majority." We did that, from frosted crystal the likes of which not the richest of our Birmingham relatives has ever acquired. And in fact, when I saw you, sister, with your pretty fingers on that delicate and faintly iridescent stem, I thought to myself: Maggie should stay, seize the main chance as they say, because maybe Mother is in Harrison's will and maybe she will kill him more or less accidentally before the inevitable rupture—or maybe, I thought, she will hold her liquor, swallow her tongue, forgive Red the Rich an inamorous night or two, and thus cement a perpetual union. For she was forty-two, twice my age, and I was thinking, in the wisdom of my new majority, that surely at forty-two the blood must cool. And didn't Maggie, our long-legged left-legged mother dear have a certain elegance that day? Why with her back-swept silver-blond hair that Harrison had bought her and her blue eye shadow she looked like a visitant from the secret heronry of some ancient Japanese water-colorist whose birds have learned to conform to the lightness of his brush. Remember? There she stood in the blue froth of the plush rug that sweating blacks had laid under Harrison's exacting eye. And what did she peer down upon, through the silver drink, in the foam of the rug? What else but her two flashing little fry which she might at will pluck up in her beak as just then she plucked up with varnished nails, cuticles glowing like cuspid moons, the olive from the crystal. I almost lost courage sister. And when she said, "Harrison wants to take us to Ernie's for Tom's birthday," it was you who had to say, "I'm so sorry. We have another engagement."

"Put it off," she said, but you had given me courage. I said, "I have put it off for twenty-one years and Maggie has put it off for seventeen. We must be off now, Mother dear, and about our father's business."

"It sounds like a matter of great moment. What might it be?" said Harrison, the fancy man, the light-footed counter-puncher, the gentleman with the gin-velvet tongue.

"Yes, what have you put off?" said Mother.

"Our leave-taking, Mother, the severance of the long rope of

your too extended care. We wish not to presume upon you further, nor shadow yours and Harrison's autumnal pleasures."

And Harrison made his whickering laugh, stretching his silken neck like a high-strung horse. "Don't let the boy leave, Mary. I dote on his wit."

"Be quiet, Harrison," she said. "Now, Tom, exactly what in the hell are you saying?"

"I am saying that Maggie and I are leaving the nest, flying the coop, cutting out. Get it?"

"Indeed," said Harrison, "what new source of sustenance have you discovered?"

"I thought you might ask that, Harrison. Actually, as soon as my availability was known, my poetic talents were entreated on every side. For instance, in the evenings in a silk jellaba I roam the rooms of aging ladies at the St. Francis and decant into their ears whisperingly the erotic adventures of my mother Mary, who, a simple girl of the hills, a preacher's daughter, unfortunate in marriage but favored by early widowhood, has slipped from sheet to sheet to the high pleasures of this penthouse."

Said Harrison whickering, "But my dear boy, you must rime it, not prose it. . . ."

"Shut up, Harrison," our mother said and then she slapped my face. And you remember that our mother did not use symbolic slaps designed merely to scald the feelings but great winging barmistresses' blows meant to knock louts upon the pavement ass over heels. So I was not merely chastised. I was struck speechless. So you spoke up. "Do you think you can get your respectability back by hitting out and cursing, Mama?"

"Shut up, Maggie. You're too young and picayunish to have any idea of what we're talking about. But Tom ought to have better sense."

"Tom and his sister would like to depart before the cordiality of these valedictions cools," I said, my tongue swollen and bleeding in my mouth.

"Do you think for one minute, you ungrateful son of a bitch, that I'm going to let you take Maggie off to some flea trap where you can write that crap you call poetry?"

"Don't fret about Maggie, Mother dear. She has her scholarship, the earnings of my nimble wit, and a room of her own—though I know she will miss the midnight Mantovani here and the sighs that seep from your contiguous bower of bliss." She moved toward me. I was hurt and angry, my tongue bitten and bleeding. "If you swing at me again, Mother dear, I will knock your pretty wigged head off, do you understand? And when gallant Harrison leaps to the rescue, I will bloody his beautiful ascot." So she did not hit me again, but I think it was only because she

knew that Harrison could not stomach an actual brawl and she was not ready to lose him yet. In fact, he rose nervously, his face suddenly surpassing in color his brightly tinted hair. "Don't let him go, Mother," I said, "for he will loose the great mastiff upon us."

"Please sit down, Harrison. I only have one last thing to say to my son. This. I will call the police. I will hire detectives. I will find you, Tom, and I will tell them that, though Maggie is too innocent to suspect it, you are unnatural. I'll charge you with an incestuous kidnapping."

"Tsk, Mother, In the waning days of my minority I was gifted with prescience and therefore all of this has been foreseen and preempted. Maggie and I have made certain statements, filed certain affidavits with kind old Judge Wilson at the juvenile court. These lie dormant now, but spring forth at our signal. How sharper than a serpent's tooth et cetera. Oh, I am aware that gallant Harrison will testify to your sterling character, risking notoriety for the woman he loves. But we will say that he was blinded by beauty, as who wouldn't be, Mother dear, you with your silver crest like a cockatoo and your heron's legs and eyes of peacock blue."

Then she turned to you. "My God, Maggie, you're not going to put yourself in his hands! A creature who would talk to his mother this way. A pervert who hates women so much that he's never touched one in his life. He'll never let you be a woman. He'll make you suck mother-hatred until you wither up and die, poisoned at the roots." You said nothing. I was afraid that your mother-fear had seized you again, that your resolve was weakening. She said, "Yes, by God I have had my men, but I have at least been a woman. But you won't ever be a woman, Maggie. You won't know what you are. You'll be a nothing. Like Tom. Tom calls himself a poet because he's a nothing."

"And is the reverse true, Mother? I said. "The fact that everybody calls Harrison a nothing—does that make him a man?"

But she never took her eyes off of you. "If you can't live with me, live in a dorm with other girls, Maggie, or get an apartment with somebody. Anything but bed with this snake."

You shook your head. "I'm not getting into this war of words between you two, Mama. My head is so full of noise I can't think. No, I don't know what I am except that I want to be different from you. So I'm going to take the room that Tom got me and study and go to college. And sooner or later something will come to me. I believe that. Good-bye, Mama."

Then, in the deeply carpeted hall where I expected to hear the last torrent of mother curses, we heard instead, "You can come back, Maggie. When you understand what I said, you come back. I'll be here." And you didn't understand why I could

not speak or why my eyes watered so in the mild wind that met us as we descended toward the wharf.

I UNDERSTAND that now, Tom. In fact, in a little while we will both understand almost everything. We only have to remember one more thing, her visit the week before she died.

I would rather remember things like the day she came to school to visit your teacher, Miss Compton, and in her drunken fury scattered pencils and paste pots and flung against the wall an ink well which made Rorschach-like the symbol of her atrabilious hatred of that old maid. Or perhaps it was Miss Compton's black and frozen pelvis. What had she done to you, Maggie?

We don't need to remember that, Tom. We only have to remember the visit, ten years ago, a week before she died. I will fill in some years, then you tell it. Remember, we kept away from her for four years, until I was through college and was twenty-one. Then we began to meet her every two or three months for a night on the town. Harrison was long gone and Ed was a little behind her, so all she had to keep her occupied for three years were bars and the hills. And then she found Boater. She had Boater for two years. Then he died. A year later she died, in 1964. But a week before, she came to our apartment, the only time she ever came to us. Do you remember that, Tom?

I remember as though it was yesterday. What is that strange ashy color in your face, Mother? Why are your lips pale and cracked? And why are your eyes mattering like an old dog's?

We gave her a drink. "You must be a good ad man, Tom, if you can afford a joint like this." And I said, "Not as good an ad man as Maggie is a couturiere." She shook her head. "Who would have thought a couple of mama-babies like you would do these things, make all this money?"

Tom. Go on, Tom. You remember what she said about the painting.

I don't want to remember that, Maggie, but I will. She said, "That picture with the big black sun is an original, isn't it? I can see the paint standing out." And I was afraid. You had lost your mother-fear, Maggie, but I was deathly afraid. Because how did she know to say *black sun*, which we hadn't seen? So I was afraid. Because if she was going to acquire at death's threshold transfiguring vision, if she was going to tell how things look from the other side where the valleys are hills and the hills valleys, where shadow is the other side of fire and the sun is black, then how could I, who had barely withstood the blasts of her merely human fury, withstand that?

She said, "But you always were a word-monger, weren't you, Tom? I'll tell you another one, my daddy. The second hour of every

sermon I thought I was in the black hole of Calcutta suffocating in my daddy's word-shit. And God knows he swamped my mama's wits. Still, I could have forgiven him that because the poor God-ridden old son of bitch didn't know what he was doing. But what I couldn't forgive him was a little thing he would sometimes read from the Bible in the quiet of evening to my mama and me. It was all about love and angels and tinkling bells and a dark glass. You know what is is, Tom." I didn't say anything, so she went on. "Nobody should write or read such a goddam speech unless they are going to do it. And nobody does it. That's what I always liked about your speeches, Tom. They were as mean and human as I could hope for. They went right into my bowels like poison."

I was afraid. I was thinking: when my mother and I have flayed the flesh from each other, when we have eaten each other's tongues, when we have plucked each other's eyes out and unraveled each other's brains, when we have eviscerated each other, when the hollow wind and the black sun have picked the bones as clean as a desert, will we find the tunnels of light that are promised? Will we sing to each other?

She said, "So maybe I shouldn't be surprised at you, Tom. But you surprise me, Maggie, making all those beautiful things out of scraps and rags, because I thought you would be a hard one. I thought you would sit behind a desk and order men around." And I said, "She does order men around, but you should have foreseen the other, too. Because she inherited all of your long beauty, Mother, out of those same high hills. Look at her legs. You were too busy calling us mama-babies to see that your daughter is a gazelle." And you laughed and said, "Be quiet, Tom."

I was afraid. Because I looked at our mother's fingers on the frosted glass of bourbon and they fluttered feebly. Like what? Like a pretty beetle on its back with its legs twisting futilely in the blind glare of the sun. And I thought, when she gets up, she will teeter one last time. Her legs will fail her at last. She will fail. And I will come crashing down, too, like an old tower rotted in its base.

She laughed. "So you are a hill girl too, Maggie. Tom is right. I see it now. Well then, you ought to thank me for not bringing you up in that nigger bottom land where your daddy died." You said, "I do thank you, Mama." And she said, "It would have driven you crazy like it drove me crazy. Sometimes down there I thought if I could just climb. If I could just get astraddle a hill, I could breathe again. But the air was like swamp gas. The nights were green and putrid with it." She took a swallow and smiled. "But here in this hump-backed son of a bitch of a city you're either going up or going down. There's no standing still or it will throw you down on your ass. You know what I like to do in this city? Carouse until dawn and then walk it. Sometimes I take a hill with a left-hand turn and run it like—what animal was that you said, Tom?" "A

gazelle." "Yes, like a gazelle. Or sometimes I get on a hill with a right-hand turn and hobble and howl like a beaten bitch. But I love it either way, because there's everywhere a corner or a crest and you never know when you turn whether you will find the sun or just another black hump of hill. That's what I like." You said, "I like it too, Mama. But there is one thing I want to ask." "What is it, Maggie?" "What did we inherit from our daddy?"

I was afraid that you had said the wrong thing, Maggie, because her lips trembled and I suddenly saw in them great gaping lesions big enough for a man to fall into. To calm myself I said to myself *fear no more the heat of the sun*. But it did no good because behind my eyes I saw her in the other place, climbing the valleys and careening up the hills in the bright shadow of the black sun. No end of it.

She said, "It would be nice for us, Maggie, if I could spin out some sweet sentiments about your daddy. But the truth is that he was a nothing, like Harrison was a nothing." She looked at me. "You saw that, Tom, and that was one reason why I was so mad the day you two left me. Ed was just the kind of shitass you find if you climb around these hills on the loose. But Harrison was worse and your daddy was worse because they were nothings. Your daddy was supposed to be a rich boy, but his daddy lost nearly everything in the depression. And then he married the daughter of a poor preacher from Ely and that took care of the rest. So that's two nothings I have lured across the tracks and given them a whiff of life, but they never said a word of thanks. A shitass, two nothings, and a half man. I thank the powers for my half man, my Boater. Take my luck, and the world what it is, it's a miracle I found that much." She drank, "But what was it you were asking me, Maggie?" "I said, what did we inherit from our daddy?"

I was afraid, because I knew the answer to that: nothing can come from nothing. And from our mother blew a cold gray breath that hadn't even the odor of ash. So I thought that the long battle between the ice and the amber was falling to the ice. The fire had failed. Still, she drank. So it was not the end at all. Fire or ice. Because the ending here is the beginning in the other place. Isn't that what the astronomers have proven? You fall through a black hole. Every exit an entrance.

Go on, Tom, What did she say?

She said, "You didn't inherit anything from him. There was nothing to inherit. Tom knows what I mean. He can say it better than I can. Say it, Tom." I said, "She means, sister, that we have inherited a propensity toward nothingness, that we have not even achieved Boater's condition. Together we do not make a half, much less a whole." And our mother said, "There you go, Maggie. All rolled up in a ball for you by our word man. I would've had to hob-

ble after it the rest of the night. Thank you, Tom. I had promised myself I wouldn't say it anyhow. I would behave myself. And haven't I behaved myself?" She stood up. "Get out of here, Tom. Or you get out, Maggie." That's all she said until she got to the door. Then she said, "I'm feeling a little punk. I'm going to lie low for a while. Don't call me, I'll call you."

But she never did, did she Maggie? She preferred to die alone. She preferred to leave none of the arrangements to us—pine box, black pall, interment without ceremony, and the black hole which did not finally, legally, the funeral lobby notwithstanding, have to be lined with concrete. Fast work for the rain and the grubs on these windy hills. A long and winding history, though, to move a hundred and thirty pounds of earth from Alabama to San Francisco.

SO THEY WERE SITTING together in a different room, larger, commanding an even finer view of bay and city, with walls high enough to hang paintings even bigger than that of the black sun.

That was ten years ago, Tom, and we have been busy. But do you know what I am thinking now?

Yes. You are thinking that it's time for you to go, that you have done all you can in your present state. You are thinking that it's time for you to take her advice. And you are right, Maggie. Go. But be ready, because the minute they know you are loose upon these hills, my beautiful sister, my hill girl, they are going to come in courtly droves, horsemen with horns and hounds more resonant and shining than the musical dawn itself. They are going to hunt you down, my beautiful gazelle. That is the way of it. Be ready.

It is time for you to leave too, Tom.

No. There is no time for me to leave, never was. When we started this remembering, sister, I always knew what we would find in the crypt. Two locked in a timeless embrace, as the poets would have it, not you and I, but she and I. So I will walk the hills with my mother. My God, what an entourage we will have. Rich boys and pick-ups, preachers and mad crones, impotents and cripples, and at our heels the motleyest dogs of the world, Boy, Dog, Dasher, pissing and howling after our old bitch, and we too drunk to know if the sun is rising or setting, if we are climbing or descending, and not caring, and who knows where we will end up? But for a while at least we will hear in the distance the graceful coursers, the melodious hounds. Run hard, my sister, run with all your heart, my beautiful gazelle, and fall only to the swiftest.

Truck Plaza: Daybreak

NANCY WESTERFIELD

This small seaport: the tall rigs standing in
Drawn without hawsers to the concrete docks,
Captains courageous braced along coffee counters,
Cabs vacant to the gray half-open eye
Of the morning, the CB's all silent
(None like radar screens blipping
Bears in the shipping lanes),
And a svelte fleet of Greyhounds disembarking
Their first passengers from noisome holds:
Immigrants herding themselves for quick safety
Into Breakfast Island, while Apollo,
Imperial Teamster, has geared his wheels
Into high, and ascends, at the intergalactic
Speed limit, the interstate of the sky.

The Lawn Swing

NANCY WESTERFIELD

Those evenings, all of our lives
Were lived closer to the last century
Than the one ahead; my father,
The closest to his own life's end,
Lost and beheaded among the tomato vines,
Was tying his plants, my sisters
Pumping the lawn swing, wildly,
Till it rounded in staves like a barrel.
"Girls! Girls!" my mother said,
And a prompt star fell. "A star
Has fallen into my eye," said
The youngest, who spread her red hair
On the slatted floor, swinging starwards.
"Wish! Wish!" we said; and the grass
That threshed in the swing slats, drew
Through our sandals needles and thread.
"How can you see to sew?" my father
The crofter said; and my mother
Abandoned her mending. Abandoners,
Off to a game of invisible ball,
We left her the creak and jerk
Of the lawn swing; and setting it
Barely in motion, she sat alone,
Always with one foot still on the ground.

Lust for the Lazy Sloe-Eyed

LEE UPTON

Our black and white dog
who rolls in the dry crusted wings of black birds
is more lazy and sloe-eyed than ever.
This summer her suitors gather from every block.
Last night the big red setter wanted her
desperately
and aimed to leap through the open window.
He teetered from the thick porch ledge,
setting his aim,
shattering three flower pots,
dashed roots and a dull thump of soil.
The distance proved too much.
He dove into a bush,
his paws scrabbling
all down the side of the house.
When I watched him labour up
to the porch again, with the heavy weight
of his love-sick eyes
I knew I have been in all the wrong places.
Somewhere for you and me
there must be such genuine passion.

Carrie and Johanna

EVE DAVIS

“**Y**OU’VE COME TO SEE the windmill?” Carrie asked incredulously, blinking in the pale spring sunshine, her hair in a tangle. She had just gotten out of bed, and now she stood on the steps of the front porch looking down at Johanna Kilgore, no friend of hers.

Johanna was two grades ahead of her in school, and Carrie knew very well that girls in the fifth grade never played with girls in the seventh grade. Unless, of course, they lived next door to each other and their mothers made them. No one lived next door to Carrie. The Bailey house stood alone on the edge of town, and playmates were scarce; loneliness, though, had never bothered Carrie. Still . . . here was Johanna Kilgore, come clear across town, a liver-colored puppy draped over her arm, and she was asking a favor, which for Carrie was a novel turn of events.

Carrie was tempted to say, “But you can see the windmill, from any place in town, almost, you can see the windmill.” But she didn’t. She waited politely.

As though she had read her thought, Johanna said, “I wanted to see it up close.”

“I have to get dressed. I have to eat breakfast, but wait here,” Carrie said. She did not invite Johanna inside; her Aunt Ola would ask too many questions and extract answers as expertly as she pulled out nails with her favorite pair of pliers. Carrie had some questions of her own: she wanted to know why a strange girl, standing with one careless hand on her hip, should remind her of a lady pirate. And why would she want to see the windmill up close? A kind of answer was contained in the conviction, coming from nowhere, that Johanna with her bold free look, with an orange scarf tied around her head, was settling in for the day, that she had come to climb the windmill and conquer it.

In alarm Carrie retreated to the sunporch where she had been sleeping on a cot ever since the weather had turned warm. Her mother who was always casting about for ways to bring the roses back into Carrie’s cheeks, to put some fat on her bones, a sparkle into her eyes, thought that sleeping on the sunporch, breathing in all that good air, would bring the roses into bloom.

Now Carrie sat on the cot, drawing on a long black ribbed stocking, her eyes straying to the book she had just finished reading when Johanna knocked on the door. With a long sigh, she pulled the blanket around her and leafed through *Treasure Island* to read certain passages again. Johanna was forgotten.

When at last she put the book down, she leaned back, folding her arms to make a pillow for her head, and thought of what a lot of waiting there was in the book: Billy Bones, Jim Hawkins, his mother . . . they waited in terror on the cliff, under the bridge, in the apple barrel; hearts plunging, pulses drumming, they waited for what was to come. Carrie understood how it was. She would recognize the terror of waiting always, no matter where she met it. It was part of her, knowledge that had flowered in her titanic battle with typhoid fever in the winter just past. She had won that battle eventually although each night she had gone down to defeat because, she thought, there was no one to help her. She was alone, or as good as alone, for her mother, crouched in a chair by her bedside, was absent in her own world of sleep. Lying rigid and straight, her heart leaping under the flannel nightgown, Carrie waited for the terror.

It began with the lights that she never saw when her mother was awake. But if she slept . . . they came. And such strange lights . . . rectangles, circles, streamers swept the room, played on the walls, disappearing, re-appearing, forcing her to the despairing conviction that they presaged the coming of . . . someone. The more she watched the lights, the more deeply convinced she was that she was waiting for a tall man in a tall hat to knock at her door, to say, it's time, I've come for you, and she would be drawn inexorably from her bed and into the cold and night.

One night, unable to endure the waiting any longer, she screamed. Mama shot up in her chair, saying what? what? and Aunt Ola's figure, fully dressed, loomed in the doorway. An ungentle hand smacked down on Carrie's forehead, and Aunt Ola lied: "She's cool, the fever's broken, Emily. Now go to bed and I'll take over. I tell you, this house can't take much more." And Mama stumbled out of the room while Aunt Ola stared down at Carrie, without liking.

But with her coming, the terror went. Not that she said anything. Oh, no. No comforting word from Aunt Ola, but she lowered her bulk into a chair that creaked under her weight, her corsets creaked in unison, and she sat there, massive, formidable, challenging.

"Aunt Ola," Carrie whispered.

"Oh, shut up, kid, and get well." Aunt Ola groaned, her chin dropped forward on her fierce bosom and she was asleep or pretended to be. Asleep or not, her presence brought a rough sanity to the room. The waiting and terror were over. The lights were

only the headlights on the cars coming over the border from Canada. The tall man in the tall hat . . . Carrie could give him no name, but she would know him again if he ever came, not here, for with Aunt Ola guarding the night, he would not dare. But elsewhere, elsewhere.

"IF YOU'RE GOING to get some fat on your bones, you'd better hike into the kitchen for some oatmeal," Aunt Ola said, and Carrie was jerked back into the spring morning. Her aunt stood in the doorway leaning on her crutch; through the window she caught a glimpse of Johanna sitting on the steps.

Fifteen minutes later she peeked out of the window and sighed. Yes, Johanna was still waiting. She had not gone away after the tepid welcome as Carrie had hoped she would. The liver-colored puppy was sniffing the grass, but Johanna scooped him up as soon as she saw Carrie and briskly led the way to the back of the house.

And there was the windmill. It was a giant who bestrode the plain on his four silver legs, his arms turning lazily in the pale blue sky. He had been there forever; he was the only one in town.

Johanna flung her head back, admiring him. She placed the puppy on the ground and before Carrie could guess her intention, she began to climb the ladder up to the platform encircling the windmill.

"Come down! Come down!" Carrie screamed. "You're not allowed! Come down!"

But Johanna only flashed a smile at her and kept on climbing. Did she mean to grab an arm when she got to the top and be flung into the sky? She might. This terrible girl was capable of anything.

Behind Carrie, someone yelled, "You damned fool, get down, do you want to get killed?" It was Aunt Ola, mad as fury, miraculously standing on one leg, her crutch churning the air in circles. At the kitchen window sat Carrie's mother, looking horrified, her coffee cup halfway to her lips. But Johanna ignored them all and kept on climbing. When she reached the platform she walked around it twice and pretended not to hear Aunt Ola's swearing.

"I like a good view," she called down, cool as ice, and then she swayed (on purpose?) while Carrie and Aunt Ola screamed together. Holding their breaths, they watched her climb down as easily as though she had spent a large part of her life scrambling up and down the masts of ships. And she was still cool as ice, haughty as a pirate queen, when Aunt Ola tongue-lashed her and told her to head for home and not come back, ever.

That was when Carrie's mother took a hand . . . she always worried about Carrie being alone so much. With her cup in her

hand she came out on the porch and leaned over the railing.

"Now, Ola," she said placatingly and called Johanna to her. She studied the child. "Of course. I know you. Your name is Kilgore, isn't it?" Johanna nodded, but not humbly. "You came to play with Carrie?" Again Johanna nodded. Mama looked at her sister and raised her eyebrows questioningly.

Aunt Ola shrugged her shoulders and stumped back into the kitchen, flinging her words like hailstones: "Be it on your own head, then. I offer no advice where it's ignored. But for the record, let me say that I am not impressed."

Carrie knew exactly what she was saying; she hoped Johanna didn't. Aunt Ola was saying that, yes, she knew Carrie needed playmates, situated as they were off on the out-skirts of a one-horse prairie town, she knew that Carrie couldn't read all the time, although she seemed to be perfectly happy doing so and why couldn't they leave well enough alone, if this was all that was offered in the way of playmates?

"Two hours, then," Mama said. "But no running in the sun. Carrie's been sick. And if you climb the windmill again, I'll have to send you home." But she smiled when she said it and looked so pretty in her lavender starched housedress that anyone could see that she would forgive a second time, though maybe not a third.

EMBARRASSED, CARRIE, while pretending not to, studied her guest and wondered how on earth she was supposed to play for two interminable hours with this intruder, unwanted, unpredictable and restless as a young horse. An alarming girl with eyes so large Carrie felt she was looking at them under a magnifying glass. She wanted to draw back from them and she did.

Johanna noticed. "Friends?" she asked and Carrie hastily answered, "Of course." She led the way to the porch and the two girls sat cross-legged on the floor with the puppy between them.

"I like your mother but I hate your aunt," Johanna said. She spoke loudly and only grinned when Carrie pointed at the open window. Aunt Ola, her leg up on a chair, usually spent the morning in the kitchen, scraping carrots, peeling potatoes and turning out pies, which were not as good as she thought they were, but were still edible. Usually, with the window open, she could overhear any conversation that took place on the porch. But not this morning, not when she was lecturing Mama, and the words fell on Carrie's shamed head like a shower of gravel.

"Sick, sick, sick," Aunt Ola said. "It's my belief that you *make* the kid sick with all this talk about sickness."

Mama made a spirited reply. "You can't argue with typhoid fever. You can't gainsay a bout with pleurisy. Out of school half the time, away off here with no neighbors, what chance does she have to make friends? So, if one shows up. . . ."

Aunt Ola's voice deepened to a growl. "There are nice people in this town . . . why can't one of *their* kids favor us with an appearance?"

"There's nothing wrong with the Kilgores. . . ."

"Nothing except that he's the town drunk even though he has a law degree and his wife takes in washing." Carrie fastened her eyes at some point beyond Johanna's shoulder. "I may not get around much with this damned leg," Aunt Ola continued, "but I hear things. And if you ask me, that Johanna girl doesn't look one hundred percent healthy to me. Look at her color. Gray. Carrie'll probably catch something from her, then there'll be thermometers and wailing and gnashing of teeth."

"Oh, hush," Mama said, looking out of the window somewhat belatedly.

Johanna returned her look, not blinking an eyelash, and said politely, "Would you ask Aunt Ola to stick her head out of the window?"

Mama hesitated and then withdrew. Carrie, intensely curious, could hear the scrape of a crutch on the linoleum. Then Aunt Ola appeared in the door, Mama behind her, and at that same moment Johanna sprang to her feet, ready for flight. But before she ran she put her thumb to her nose and said venomously, "Bitch. Old bitch." Then she jumped off the porch and ran. Aunt Ola gasped. They all gasped and, thunderstruck, watched her pelting down the road to town.

Anyone would have conceded that Aunt Ola had a right to be furious. But no Instead she laughed and laughed, wiping her eyes on her apron while the crutch fell to the floor and she had to lean on a chair to stay upright. When at last she could speak, she said appreciatively, "Spirited. I always call a spade a spade, too."

It was plain to Carrie that like weights on a scale, Johanna had shot up in Aunt Ola's regard and judging from the expression on her mother's face, down in Mama's. Aunt Ola didn't even hold it against her that she had left the puppy behind. Mama did. That night, after having waited all day for Johanna to claim him, they put him in the shed with food and water, and Carrie who had fallen in love with him hoped that Johanna would never show up again.

This was bath night. In the kitchen Carrie's father lifted the tub of warm water from the stove to the linoleum, and Carrie with her knees up to her chin was dreaming in the soapsuds.

"Lots of spirit," said Aunt Ola with a reminiscent smile. "Just what I'd a done myself under the same circumstances." She was sitting by the stove with one shoe resting on the grate. There was a smell of burning shoe leather in the air.

"You're burning your shoe," Mama said in the voice she used when she wanted to change the subject. Everyone but Aunt Ola

was tired of talking about Johanna.

"And careless. So was I," Aunt Ola continued, pressing her shoe harder against the grate. "Listen to that pup." She jerked her head toward the shed door. "Well, I'm not going to clean up the shed tomorrow. I categorically refuse to. What if I slipped in the you-know-what and ruined my last good leg?"

"I'll do it," Mama said grimly.

So no one, except Aunt Ola, was in the mood to welcome Johanna when she knocked at the back door the next morning.

"Yes?" said Mama, decidedly cool. Carrie held the puppy tightly to her breast. Aunt Ola waited with interest.

"I've come to apologize to Aunt Ola, I'm sorry, I truly am, and can Carrie come out?"

Aunt Ola laughed delightedly.

"No," said Mama.

But Aunt Ola trumpeted, "Oh, for the Lord's sake, let her go! You've kept her cooped up long enough. Don't you want a sparkle in her eyes? Roses in her cheeks?" Clever Aunt Ola.

Mama hesitated, then ordered: "Wait outside, you two, and not under the window." A few minutes later she came out, color high in her cheeks, with an alarm clock in her hand. "Take the time with you," she said to Carrie. "I've set it to ring in two hours." She turned to Johanna, a shade too politely, "And may I ask your plans?"

"I thought she'd like to see my play house," Johanna said in a babyish voice and Mama looked hard at her.

"When the time goes off, I want you home," she said to Carrie who nodded languidly. She was not interested in playhouses; she felt she'd gone beyond that stage and so should have Johanna.

BUT OFF THEY went and as they walked Johanna bragged about her playhouse. It was small, she said, but airy and with a lovely view. By the time they reached town, Carrie was wild with envy. On the main street Johanna paused in front of a grocery store and thrust the puppy into Carrie's arms. "You walk on," she ordered. "I'll catch up."

Puzzled but obedient, Carrie walked past the drygoods store, past the Oddfellows' Hall and past the feed store where Johanna joined her, an arm clamped across the front of her dress. "I just stole a big chocolate bar, about a half a pound, I bet. We'll eat it when we get to the playhouse." Carrie was not especially surprised. She herself would not have dreamed of stealing, but she was not adverse to sharing in the plunder.

In a few minutes they left the town behind them and came to the railroad tracks. Scrambling up the embankment, Johanna said, "We'll walk the ties until we pass the grain elevators, then we come to the playhouse." Carrie nodded, thrilled and a little

dazed. Never before had she been in the company of a thief, never before had she walked railroad ties or balanced on the tracks like a tightrope walker.

But where was the playhouse? She stopped and looked hopefully about her, wondering where it was hidden, deciding it must be a long ways off, for there was nothing to be seen here except the railroad tracks curving into the gentle hills and the snow fences strategically placed to keep the snow from clogging the tracks in the wintertime.

"Here it is," said Johanna with a sidewise look at her companion and she climbed a little rise. Carrie stared and turned full circle. She could see no house. There was none . . . only a snow fence, triangular in shape, like a pup tent, with slatted boards forming the two sides. You had to look twice to see snow fences, they were such an integral part of the prairie.

"Where? Where?" Carrie asked, but Johanna did not answer. She dropped to her hands and knees and crawled inside the fence, emerging from the other end and looking up at Carrie with a bravado that dared her to be anything but pleased.

"Look, I've done you a big favor, bringing you here," Johanna said with an anger that was overdone, and Carrie answered hastily, "I know, I know." Then she, too, dropped to her knees and crawled inside the fence, over grass striped with sunlight, and out the other end. She tied the clock to one of the boards with the sash from her dress and sat back on her heels to admire the effect. "How would it be," she asked, resigned to playing house in a snow fence, "if we lived out here all year long?" Enamoured of the idea, she went on. "If we ate what we wanted and slept when we wanted? How would it be?"

But Johanna paid no attention and after an uncertain moment Carrie sat down on the grass beside her, the snow fence at their backs, the town that Johanna was studying with such grave attention, in front of them. Carrie studied it, too, until she became aware of her companion's unsteady breathing and the heart that leapt under her dress. Startled, she saw a cupped hand move up, descend suddenly as though it closed over a bird or a fish, and stay. So might a pirate discipline terror. Johanna even did it absent-mindedly as though she were obliged to devote all her energies for the little town that she must draw into her being. Carrie glanced fleetingly into her face, almost expecting to see it reflected in those magnified eyes. Awed by Johanna's intensity, Carrie examined the town again.

Although the elevators cut off part of the main street, one side of it was visible. People went in and out of stores, cars stopped at the postoffice and the morning train pulled out of the depot. Farther north, a cluster of buildings hid Carrie's house, but nothing hid the windmill, and from this new viewpoint she

studied it with pride, understanding for the first time why Johanna had come to visit the day before. It had sent out its curved silver glance across the town to her, challenging her. She had to come. She had to climb it. What a glorious thing to do even with all the screaming and swearing going on below! Or did that only add to the excitement of conquering? Carrie was no conqueror. She knew it. And she knew more . . . that she was a coward and would never climb beyond the fifth rung of the ladder to the platform encircling the windmill. For the rest of her life she would be nailed to the ground by eyes blurred with fright, by hands oily with sweat. A coward. She groaned.

"Hush," Johanna said in a whisper, and Carrie discovered that it was the road, not the town, that demanded her attention. While Johanna looked, the chocolate lay in the grass uneaten and the puppy slept in the lap of her dress. And there was nothing to see. Only a car coming from an outlying farm, only an empty wagon with a woman driving the horses, and a man walking beside it.

"WHY ARE WE waiting?" What are we waiting for?" Carrie asked impatiently and got to her feet, but Johanna did not look up and her intensity drew Carrie down like a magnet. What did Johanna expect to see coming along the road this mild spring morning? Gypsies? It was the wrong time of the year for them. Indians? There was an Indian reservation fifty miles away. Indians were possible. But they were not the answer; they were not what Johanna was waiting for.

Waiting.

The word was as chilly as the breeze that sprang up from nowhere and fanned Carrie's cheek. She looked at the road again, and now the car had vanished into the town and the man had fallen back from the wagon. She could see him clearly as he walked by himself with long leisurely strides . . . a tall man with a high-crowned hat. She thought he turned his head and looked in their direction.

Waiting . . .

Carrie froze. And the horses lifted their forefeet in unison and did not bring them down again. Smoke from the chimneys lay unmoving on the windy air. A bird hung like a dark flower above their heads and no wing dipped. Everything waited. Until the stuttering of the alarm clock brought life again to horses, smoke and bird; releasing Carrie who shot to her feet, breathless, her coward's heart hammering.

"I've got to go home."

Johanna lifted blind puzzled eyes. "Come back tomorrow, will you?" She lifted the pup. "Here, you can have him."

Carrie cradled him in her arms; fat and warm, he squirmed

and licked her throat. Pay back, her mother always said, but Carrie had nothing to give in return, except the clock. "You take the time," Carrie said, and Johanna held the cold metal against her cheek.

Using the windmill as a compass, Carrie decided to take a shortcut home and not go through the town. Just before she crossed the railroad tracks, she turned to look at Johanna who must have been looking at her, too, for she raised her hand.

"Tomorrow," Carrie called.

"O.K."

"I promise."

"O.K."

Their voices flew back and forth, heavy with love, plaintive as echoes, and Carrie took a step back on the way she had come.

"No!" Johanna shouted and Carrie hesitated. But of course she could not go back. The alarm clock had rung.

The next morning she had a sore throat. "Under no circumstances will I let you go out," her mother said, smearing Carrie's throat with mentholatum and pinning an old sock around it. "You know better than to sit down on the damp ground. This is your fault, Ola." Aunt Ola just looked disgustedly at Carrie.

Sparrow and crow, they duelled over her head, but she was oblivious to both of them. In pain and despair she was wondering if climbing beyond the fifth rung of the windmill would lessen the ache of an unkept promise. And when she reached the platform, when she looked across town, beyond the elevators, toward the snow fence, would it lessen, somehow, the weight of a terrible knowledge that was as heavy as iron, as cold?

Crossings

JEAN LEAVITT

I walk slowly
the teetering bridge
a silent strand of bamboo
stretching from stranger to stranger.
Swaying in light wind
I wonder if the ends
will break
away from the cliff
and my words pour
so many grains
into the thread of river.

My way to work is strewn
with carcasses
of innocent animals.
They lie severed and flat—
squirrels, cats of all sizes
dogs of many breeds, rabbits
pheasants. And once
I saw a deer knocked to its knees
breathing heavily, eyes wide
with wonder, straining
to lift its stunned weight.

There is no way to get through
this year without blinders.
Everywhere innocents turn away
unable to recognize pillage
of their own hands.
If I stop
and let the pacing halt,
defer the crossing of the bridge
I will be stranded at noon
under a dulled sun
joints ungainly, swollen.

Marooned in this vision
this sound of my voice
cannot catch that passing stranger
cannot hold his hands in the animal's corpse
cannot scar his neck with whiplash
cannot cause an answering scream
cannot cross over.



Contributors

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